

Story 2198 (1962 Tape 75)

Narrator: Unidentified

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Ankara Province and
of Turkey

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Deli¹ Mehmet Chooses Unlucky Road

While Deli Mehmet and Deli Ahmet were traveling together, they came to a fork in the road. They decided to part there, each taking one of the two roads ahead of them. Before Deli Ahmet could make a choice about which way to go, Deli Mehmet said, "I shall take the road to the right." Deli Ahmet then had no choice, of course, but to follow the road leading left

As Deli Mehmet started down the road he had chosen, rain began to fall. He was soon thoroughly soaked. When he reached a village, he knocked on the door of the first house he saw. When a woman opened the door, Deli Mehmet asked, "Will you accept me as a guest of Allah in your home tonight?"²

¹Deli literally means crazy, though here, as in many folktales, it refers to a person who is simple or foolish rather than insane. In earlier times deli could describe the selflessness and fanaticism of one fighting for a religious cause.

²Asking to be "accepted as a guest of Allah" is such a strong plea that it is usually not rejected. In this case, a woman alone in a house cannot very well accept a male guest.

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The woman answered, "Brother, this is the holy month of Ramazan.³ All of the men are in the mosque praying. and stand outside the mosque, and one or another of the worshipers leaving the prayer service will surely invite you to stay at his home." Cold and wet, Deli Mehmet ran to the mosque.

When the worshipers had completed the prayer service, they began to file out of the mosque. As they passed Deli Mehmet, he kept crying out, "Will you take me home with you? Will you take me home with you?" But no one listened to him. Finally the last person to leave the mosque was the hoca.⁴

When the hoca came out, he saw that a poor man was sitting in a corner of the courtyard of the mosque. He asked, "What are you doing here, son?"

Deli Mehmet answered, "I came to be a shepherd

³Ramazan (Ramadan in most other Muslim lands) is a month of fasting and religious observances.

⁴A hoca is the preacher and religious leader of a Muslim community. In pre-Republican times he was also a teacher for education was then the responsibility of the clergy. In the Republic, schoolteachers are required to have secular rather than religious training. Even today, however, a teacher or professor may, for sentimental reasons, be called hoca.

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this village, but I need a place to stay tonight."

The hoca said, "I need a person like you, too. Let us go to my home." When they arrived there, the hoca gave Deli Mehmet dry clothes to wear. After awhile the hoca said, "I must return to the mosque to conduct the teravi⁵ service. I shall not return until 5 o'clock in the morning. I shall have a lantern in one hand and a walking stick in the other. I shall be wearing a robe and a turban. These things should identify me clearly. When I come home, I shall knock on the door three times and say, 'My son, Mehmet, it is the hoca. Open the door.' Look out the window and make sure that I am the person outside it. Don't open the door to anyone else!"

"All right, hoca."

After the hoca had departed, his wife went out briefly to visit all of their neighbors. During her conversation with these people the woman described in detail all of the instructions that the hoca had given Mehmet.

⁵An additional (6th) prayer service held during Ramazan. Usually the last prayer service is yatsı, which begins two hours after sunset. But during Ramazan yatsı is succeeded, a little later in the night, by teravi, a much longer and thus more physically taxing service.

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Fixing his bed near the door, Deli Mehmet climbed into it and immediately fell asleep. At 1 o'clock in the morning a man knocked on the door. That man called out, "My son, Mehmet, it is the hoca. Open the door

Mehmet arose, still very tired and very sleepy. Looking through the window, he saw outside a man who seemed to be dressed and equipped the way the hoca was supposed to be. Since that man looked exactly like the hoca, Mehmet opened the door and admitted him into the house. Then he went back to sleep again.

At 2 o'clock the same thing happened. Another man came, knocked on the door, and said, "My son, Mehmet, it is the hoca. Open the door." Mehmet looked out the window and saw a man who looked like the hoca. Mehmet was so tired that he had at that moment forgotten about the man who had come earlier.

Another man entered the house under the same circumstances at 3 o'clock, and a fourth one arrived an hour later. Deli Mehmet did not get a good night's sleep. At 5 o'clock the real hoca returned to his home and knocked on the door. "My son, Mehmet, it is the hoca. Open the door.

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"You damned hocas!" said Mehmet.

"What is the matter, son?"

Deli Mehmet replied, "This house is already filled with hocas, and now you, the fifth one, have arrived. Were you all playing some sort of trick on me?"

"But I am the real hoca," said the man. "I was the one who brought you here. Open the door, son."

"All of the others looked exactly like you," said Mehmet, but he did finally open the door.

"Whatever happened will now be finished. I know who those other fellows are! Here, Mehmet, take this axe." It was a very sharp axe. The hoca armed himself with his gun. He said to Mehmet, "Strike with that axe anyone who rushes to get out of the house."

It was completely dark as the hoca felt his way farther into the house. After a couple of moments, he fired his gun. The loud noise frightened the oxen, the donkeys, and the other livestock, all of which began running about wildly.⁶ When one of the oxen approached Mehmet,

⁶To understand this melee of men and beasts, one must be aware of a rural housing arrangement common in much of the Middle East and in parts of Europe. Livestock are frequently kept not in a barn but on the ground floor of a family's home; the family lives above them on the second floor of the building.

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he supposed that it was one of the false hocas, and he struck it a powerful blow with his axe. The ox slumped to the floor and died right there. In the uproar and the mad scramble of the animals, all four of the false hocas managed to escape.

When the hoca lighted a lamp, he was shocked by what it revealed. "What did you think you were doing, Mehmet, when you killed my ox?"

"You told me to strike anything rushing past me, and that is what I did."

"Those men used to come here almost every day," said the hoca, "and I could not always cope with them,⁷ but their coming never before cost me a valuable animal. Leave this house at once, Mehmet. Go to such and such an ağa⁸ who lives on the opposite side of this village. He may have some job at which you can work

⁷There is no indication as to whether the intruders are there to commit theft or to have assignations with the hoca's wife.

⁸An ağa is a rural landowner, often wealthy and sometimes powerful. The title is neither official nor heritable. It is more a sign of economic status. Most farm workers are employees of ağas. On both the rural and urban scenes the term ağa may be used simply as a mild honorific extended to a distinguished or perhaps just older man than the speaker: Ahmet Ağa.

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When Deli Mehmet reached the home of the ağa, he asked that man for a job. He said, "My ağa, I should like to work for you as a shepherd. Do you need a shepherd?"

The ağa accepted him on that basis and invited him into the house. At the time that he arrived there, the ağa's wife had begun to cook soup with which to feed the ağa's laborers. As Mehmet entered the house, he took off his shoes and flung them aside. Unfortunately, he was so weary and confused that he threw them in the wrong direction, and they landed in the soup kettle. The woman was furious and wanted to throw Mehmet out of the house at once. But the ağa disagreed with her, saying, "He is already in unfortunate condition. Give him something to eat, and feed that befouled soup to the dogs."

Deli Mehmet said, "Oh, my ağa, I am very hungry, and I wish that you would give that kettle of soup to me instead of to the dogs." They therefore gave Mehmet the tire kettle of soup. He ate some of it immediately. He ate more for his noon meal. And he ate the rest of it his supper. Members of the family and all of the farm workers stared in disbelief as he consumed that whole batch of soup

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When Mehmet was being shown his bed that evening, the ağa said to him, "You have eaten a great amount of soup, and you may have to go to the toilet several times during the night. Wake me up each time and let me lead you outside to the toilet. I have two fierce watchdogs which might attack you if you went out there alone.

After he had been sleeping for awhile, Deli Mehmet woke up and called to the ağa, for he needed to go out to the toilet. The ağa took him outside, waited for him, and then led him back to his bed. About half an hour later Mehmet again called to the ağa for the same kind of assistance. When the ağa returned this second time, his wife said to him, "Damn that Mehmet! He ate a whole potful of soup, and as a result neither he nor we will get much sleep tonight

Deli Mehmet overheard the woman's remark, and so the next time that his stomach was griped, he said nothing but instead defecated in the fireplace. The next time he felt the call of nature, he looked for some receptacle for his waste. Finding none, he filled the ağa's boots with his excrement⁹

⁹This kind of scatological humor is not uncommon in folktales.

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When he returned to his bed this time, however, Mehmet could not resume his sleep. He felt too guilty about what he had done, and he feared what the consequences might be. After worrying about this for awhile, he decided that it was necessary for him to leave the ağa's house. He crept out through the door very quietly to avoid rousing the watchdogs, but there was no way to escape the attention of those two fierce creatures. He had not taken five steps before they pounced upon him, knocking him to the ground, and began howling.

Starting up from his sleep, the ağa shouted, "Wife, bring me my boots quickly! The dogs may kill that shepherd unless I call them off." The woman brought the boots, but as soon as the ağa stepped into them, he found himself covered with Mehmet's dung. Infuriated by this, the ağa went outside and saved Mehmet's life, but his first words were used to fire Mehmet from his job. "Leave here immediately! I don't ever want to see you again!"

This time Mehmet walked a great distance before he reached another village. When he arrived there, he began knocking on door after door and asking resident after resident for a job. He had been encountering so much bad luck

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by this time he was very discouraged. He wondered if he would ever find a satisfactory job. Finally, however, a widow responded to his request for work. She said to

"The most important part of your work will be the care of my small child when I am absent." Mehmet accepted this job at once

One day the widow said to Mehmet, "Today I must go some distance and do some laundry work for a large family. I shall be gone for some time. While I am gone, son, do not let the child cry and do not let anything harm the mother hen and her baby chicks. Here is a jar of pekmez.¹⁰ When you and the child become hungry, you can dip bread in this pekmez and enjoy a pleasant meal.

"All right, big sister; don't worry about anything here. I shall take care of everything."

Just as soon as the woman was out of sight, Mehmet got out the jar of pekmez and a large loaf of bread. He had a great appetite, and he at once began to eat bread soaked in pekmez. While Mehmet was busy eating, a wolf came along, sneaked in close to the house, stole one of the baby chicks, and ran away with it. The mother hen gave a call of

¹⁰ Pekmez is made of grape juice cooked down until it is thick, like molasses.

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alarm, "Bak! Bak! Bak!" Leaving the child in the house Mehmet ran outside to see what had happened. He discovered that a chick was missing, but not knowing what to do about that, he returned to the house and continued eating. After devouring the chick, the wolf soon returned for another one. Mehmet realized then that it would not be easy to protect the widow's chickens. He gathered all of the chicks and tied them to the hen's leg, thinking that their mother would protect them. He then returned to his pekmez and bread.

The next time the wolf came, he seized the hen and ran off with her, as well as with the remaining chicks tied to her leg. This theft caused so much noise that Mehmet had time to rush outside and identify the thief. He grabbed a stick and began to chase the fleeing wolf. Mehmet ran very swiftly, so swiftly, in fact, that he could not stop when he came to a cliff. He tumbled over that cliff and was killed as his body struck the ground far below.

[Audience intrusion] "What happened to his friend,
Deli Ahmet?"

[Narrator's response] "There has not yet been any
report about him."